KAFKA'S "METAMORPHOSIS" APPROACHED VIA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE"

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Abstract: The paper expands upon Kafka's "Metamorphosis" as the extreme representation of alienation neurosis caused by "the arbitrary character of the infinite and by existential absurdity" (Chira, 183). From a methodological point of view, we will turn to good account the concept of "time's thermodynamical arrow" which reveals "the sense of time where disorder or entropy increases" (Hawking, 113). In order to properly approach the individual disorder and the mental and spiritual dislocation of Kafka's character, Jung's psycho-analytical theory, Bachelard's aesthetics and Chira's interdisciplinary studies will be also taken into account and closely observed in our analysis of the dramatic effects of the extreme form of alienation described in "Metamorphosis".

Keywords: metamorphosis, alienation, time's thermodynamic arrow, interdisciplinarity, Franz Kafka.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the relation between anthropology and health in Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis". For our approach to be properly constructed, a short presentation of the author's biographical background is extremely relevant in this respect.

Franz Kafka was born in a Jewish family in Prague. The pragmatic paternal descent intermingles with the bizarre and romantic maternal component giving birth to a complex and highly controversial personality. Kafka took his doctor degree in judicial science which offered him the possibility to be employed as jurist in an insurance agency. He was equally interested in philosophy and literature. Kierkegaard, Heinrich von Kleich, Martin Buber, Maimonides together with Pascal, Thomas Mann, Hesse, Flaubert, Strindberg, Dostoievski, Cehov and Goethe, are the stellar personalities who have extensively and intensively influenced him. He died of tuberculosis in 1924, at the age of 41, being buried in the new graveyard from Prague.

Ever since 1908, he started contributing to Hyperion, the German review from München, where he published eight texts from "Contemplation". The fertile period of his literary creation began in 1912 when he wrote "The Verdict" and "Metamorphosis" followed by "The Penitenciary Colony" and "The Process", the last being only posthumously published. This background is extremely relevant because his characters are "nothing else but the author's alter egos" (Chira, 58). The frequent use of the anagram derives precisely from the identification of the author with his characters, claims Chira. As concerns the name of the main character, Gregor Samsa, from "Metamorphosis", the presence of the vowel "u", repeated twice in the same position as in Kafka, is a further proof of the author's identification with his character (Chira, 58).

The body of analysis consists in the story itself. Simple as it is, it reveals a "limiting condition" (Hawking, 104), because Gregor Samsa, after graduating the Faculty of Economic Sciences and becoming a conscientious salesman, wakes up one morning changed into "a monstruous cockroach" (5).

The methodology employed by us in order to find a reasonable entry to decoding this unusual metamorphosis consists of Stephen Hawking's book entitled "The Universal Theory" which offers interesting explanations regarding the increase of general and individual disorder

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and entropy. Hawking claims that the gradual increase of disorder is an example of "time's arrow" (113). The same Hawking opines that "the thermodynamic time arrow" reflects "the pattern of time where disorder or entropy increases" (112). It is precisely the thermodynamic time arrow that will be turned to account in order to explain the character's dislocation from the family and professional background, his absurd metamorphosis into a myriapod and his profound alienation.

Chira opines that alienation always occurs in a "familiar habitat when the individual has plenty of time to face his selfhood" (61). The familiar locus of his metamorphosis is "his little normal human room" (89). The adjective "human" associated with the noun "room" suggests the writer's profound anthropological concern. This room seems "to have gathered the universe within an object" (Bachelard, 113). The adjective "little", on the other hand, makes us contemplate what Bachelard called "the dimension of intimacy" (115). This concept is also extremely relevant in terms of the Jungian psycho-analytical theory focused on the explanation of human vulnerability. Jung claims that alienation appears when the ego has got out of the ego-self equation and experiences frustrated expectations symbolically rendered as: fall, exile, an unhealed wound, a perpetual torture. In the case of Gregor Samsa, his torture can be put in relation with the distorted relation between ego and self which has paradoxically materialized itself in his transformation into a "myriapod", the supreme form of alienation.

We cannot read this metamorphosis as a "simple product of imagination" (Bachelard, 115), but as some sort of "alienation neurosis". Jung claims that "alienation neurosis" affects people to such an extent that they lose their right to live as normal beings. The same Jung states that when an individual surpasses the ordinary forms of anxiety, depression, suicidal impulses, he might reach "the phase of living the self in projection" (12), projection which, in Kafka's case, turns into reality. The maximum alienation occurs when the individual identifies himself with his representation projection and lives it in an authentic manner.

As concerns the causes which might generate the "alienation neurosis", Chira claims that it is to be found in the unusual Kafkaian background which is strange, absurd, deterministic generating "perpetual torture" (63). We identify all these Kafkaian features in the first person narrative. It best renders the "limiting condition'' characteristic for the main character's life.

His damnation is also caused by his own "spiritual chemistry" (Chira, 63). His perceiving himself in a state of social alienation occurs when he assumes his "exhausting profession: on the road, day in, day out … and there's the additional ordeal of travelling, worries about train connections, the irregular bad meals, new people all the time, no continuity, no affection" (88).

This sort of repression resembles what Bachelard called the "unskillful dynamism", because "Metamorphosis" does not reproduce life, it denies it, opposing a delusion which pretends to replace it (50)

The delusion experienced by Gregor Samsa is related to the "dimension of intimacy" (61) which is usually infinite. In the case of Kafka's character, through his transformation into a myriapod, the "dimension of intimacy" becomes finite. And yet, it is experienced so intensively that he confronts himself with inverted reflexes.

Joe Bousquet, quoted by Bachelard, states that "Any intimacy hides itself … Nobody can see me while I am changing / I change myself. But who could see me? I am my own hiding place". His inverted reflexes can be interpreted both from a medical and anthropological perspective as "the superlative of secretiveness" (Bachelard, 153). And yet, Gregor Samsa moves in the opposite direction, in the sense that he wants his transformation to be noticed and understood by the others.

Getting back to self-deception, to delusion, Kafka's character still hopes that he might recover, catch the train, and, through a terrible effort, return to the former life pattern. His

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delusion is related to his wish to help his parents pay back their debt to the one who actually employed him as salesman. This assumed duty generates a triple stress: for Gregor, for his family and even for his employee. The employee sends the chief clerk to investigate "Gregor's delinquency" (94) of having lost the early morning train. His metamorphosis is totally alien to Gregor. He makes desperate efforts to get up; he understands his parents' discomfort. He gets scared when he hears his voice "an impressible squeaking that left the words only briefly recognizable at the first instant of their sounding" (90). The semiotics of sound plays an important part in this story. Every member of the family addresses him in a more or less insistent manner. His mother's voice is "mild" (30), while his father's sounds aggressive and impatient.

As concerns his physical condition he is anxious to see "how the hallucinations" (10) will come to an end. He feels pains all over the body, the incapacity to coordinate his movements. He interprets the change of his voice as the expression of a severe cold "the professional disease of salesman" (92).

The incertitude of the members of his family regarding his present condition makes him excuse them for their insistent behaviour. However, he cannot excuse the chief clerk who keeps accusing him that he worries his parents and neglects his professional duties.

The moment of complete objectivity, perfectly postponed by Kafka, is assured by the polarity voice-appearance. The distinctive signs of this polarity are extremely profound ones, opening two distinctive axes. Kafka opposes the rationality of the family members, of the chief clerk, to the irrationality of the character. Being all rational people, they are prepared to admonish him. The irrational erupts when they hear his voice "it was an animal's squeaking" (110), claims the chief clerk, while mother and sister start screaming.

The readers become familiar with his appearance as early as the first page "his brown belly sectioned off by little crescent -shaped ridges into segments. His numerous legs, pathetically frail by contrast to the rest of him (87).

Later, on page 99, we learn that his little legs secreted some sort of sticky substance "and that he got strong mandible". They are all scared when he gets out of the room. Mother faints, father looks first aggressive, but then he starts crying. The chief clerk leaves in a hurry, before his father hits Samsa with a stick, making him return to his room.

From a phenomenological perspective, Bachelard claims that the phenomenologist has to reach "the extreme limit of images" (51). Bachelard continues and says that the phenomenologist, instead of explaining, reducing, comparing, will exaggerate and will refresh the primitiveness and peculiarity of fears, of extreme situations (51).

To a certain extent, Kafka is concerned with demonstrating the primitiveness of his character in order to "turn to account a centre of loneliness" (Bachelard, 160) concentrated within an obscure room. The true value of such experiments arises from the intensity of the experience rendered through the verb "to metamorphose", in Kafka's case.

The primitive nature of Gregor Samsa derives from his way of moving on his little hairy legs which are secreting a sticky substance, from his way of being fed – in a bowl, from his withdrawing under the bed whenever his sister Greta enters the room.

His primitiveness lived in simple images can be put in relation with the concept of sound symbolism. Bachelard turns to account one of the theorems regarding the imaginary character of light, saying that "Whatever shines, sees" (69). Paraphrasing this quotation we might say that "Whatever hears, feels". Consequently, alone in his room, Gregor Samsa hears about the precarious financial condition of his family, now that he is no longer able to support them.

Under the circumstances, only Greta, his sister, continues to be closely attached to him. Samsa's plan is to send her to the Academy of Music and to financially support her. He wants to inform his family about his intention on Christmas Eve. No matter how strong his

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desire to protect his family is, he senses their hostility. Even his sister can hardly prevent herself from showing out her disgust whenever she enters his room. Besides family hostility and repudiation, he also senses the hostility coming from the new tenants and the chairwoman.

Dirty, wounded, abandoned, weak, Samsa becomes the simple emblematic image for a particular spiritual condition. Another revelatory image is that of his sister playing the violin. Samsa tries to establish a certain spiritual community with his sister when he hears her playing the violin. Moreover, he intends to draw her attention upon his being present and to suggest her to join him to his room because no one appreciates her as much as he does. He also intends to talk to her about his intention to send her to the Academy of Music. He is suddenly noticed by the tenants and everybody is contaminated by fear and disgust. Even his sister refers to him as the "animal" that "hounds up, drives away the tenants, evidently wants to take over the whole flat, and throws us out on to the street". She vehemently concludes "we must try and get rid of it" (138). Back to his room, he notices pains all over his body and makes the discovery that he can no longer move. He is convinced that he needs to disappear. He is overwhelmed by devotion and love for his family. "The last thing he saw was the sky gradually lightening outside his window. Then his head involuntarily dropped, and his final breath passed feebly from his nostrils" (141)

This last image impresses through the double transcendence of what can be seen and of what can be heard. Paraphrasing Loys Masson's "Icarus or the Traveller" which says "I heard him / closing his eyes and opening them", we may come across "I heard him closing his eyes and feebly passing away". Such paraphrasing places the story under the sign of the verb "to hear". This last image, the most fragile and insubstantial reveals profound vibrations.

In terms of conclusions and results, our approach has been intended to move beyond the surface of things, to become familiar with sounds, images and to grant them a psychological charge. The paradoxical metaphor of transforming the character into a myriapod has been intended to reveal a peculiar psychological reality. Such metamorphosis helps us become aware of the most fragile aspects of life. When the story ends, it actually rises again in our consciousness.

The story entitled "Metamorphosis" can be ultimately interpreted as a phenomenological document. It is the phenomenology of the verb "not to be able to get out of the condition of non-being and return to the condition of human being" (243). Bachelard also states that for someone to truly experience an image, one has to become familiar with the "becoming of the human being, who represents a new image in terms of its non-being" (243).

Jung claims that under some terrible stress, people's life transforms itself, metamorphoses. No matter how exaggerated the image of Samsa metamorphosed into a myriapod might appear, through this extreme state of mental deviation, of alienation, Kafka has positioned himself on what Bachelard called "the axis of an autonomous imagination" (18). Samsa's partial primitiveness which still allows him to think, to feel, to have "temporal explosions" (167) of his being, to desperately attempt to interrelate with his family, is symptomatic.

Chira claims that Samsa's loneliness, his anxiety, his monstrous metamorphosis, is closely related to the "arbitral character of the infinite and of the existential absurdity". Such features contaminate the relation between anthropology and health and the effects of this contamination have led to an exaggerated situation. They have been employed in order to describe the suffering of a character, even if they have been dictated by "an imaginary anatomy" (Bachelard, 252).

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